

SHIFTING GEARS

THE CHANGING MEANING OF WORK IN MASSACHUSETTS, 1920-1980

GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS

INTERVIEWEE: Joseph "Alphee" Leblanc

INTERVIEWER: Martha Norkunas

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TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen A. Jenkins

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

MN: Today is September 8, 1988 and I'm with Joseph "Alphee" Leblanc.

JL: That's right.

MN: Alright. That's what. Well we might as well start right in the thick of things. That's what I was trying to tell you that people are afraid to talk to me about.

JL: I don't think they're afraid. I don't see why they should be afraid. I have no idea why they should be afraid.

MN: I have one guy comes and says to me I don't know what I'm afraid of. Umm. It's not like I'm going to be hired from fired from Heywood-Wakefield. It's been closed for ten years.

JL: Em huh. That's true. I don't know why everybody's afraid to talk about Heywood. In case you don't know, I'll tell you anyway even if you do know. If it wasn't for a union you wouldn't have a country. Because the thirteen colonies were getting the hell kicked out of them till they banded together for formed the United States of America. Then they won. Because they had a union. Otherwise, the thirteen colonies would have got licked one-by-one. That's the truth.

MN: And how how do you.

JL: That's the union.

MN: Yeah, yeah.

JL: In case you don't know, I've told you. So if it wasn't for a union you wouldn't have a country.

MN: How did you get. Well why don't I start at the beginning. You said that your parents are from Canada?

JL: Em huh.

MN: What brought.

JL: Well we came here.

MN: What brought them to Gardner.

JL: Well we went to Maine. Then to Salem, Mass., then to Gardner.

MN: Do you know why they came down here?

JL: Better their lives. Get out from under the English rule.

MN: Because you're Acadian?

JL: That's true.

MN: And there's a lot of Acadians in Gardner.

JL: A lot of Acadians all the way down the coast but they have oh the Quebecs and the Montreals. They think their a little classier than we are, but we all come from the same trash or whatever you want to call it.

MN: And were you born in Gardner then?

JL: No, I was born in Canada.

MN: How old were you when you came here?

JL: Too young to remember Canada. A year and a half, two years old. And I've been in the United States ever since. I remember going to Camp Devens during the war to be enlisted or whatever.

MN: Camp? I'm sorry.

JL: Camp Devens.

MN: Oh, Camp Devens.

JL: Or Fort Devens. And there was a white line on the floor and they said all those that are not born in this country who do not care to defend this country please step over the line, which we had a right to do if we were foreigners or whatever. And I did step over the line, so later on when I came to become a citizen that was not against me. You know.

MN: And then how old were you when you started to work?

JL: Well, you have to do some arithmetic. I am now seventy-eight going on seventy-nine and I started to work in 1928. Now, I never stopped to figure that one out so you figure it out.

MN: What year were you born?

JL: Nineteen nine (1909). Let me see, 1909 to 1929.

MN: Nineteen years old.

JL: That would be twenty years old.

MN: Just about. Nineteen.

JL: Yuh, I started to work at 19.

MN: In the wood shops?

JL: I worked in, I counted them one time, 25 factories in Gardner. There was that many.

MN: Were they all wood shops?

JL: No. Some metal. Some wood. Like tricycles, baby carriages, furniture, warm stove, (.....unintelligible) stoves. I wasn't fussy.

Especially in 1929 and '30 and '31. The real depression days when you bought a pair of soles for ten cents each and glued them onto your shoes and stayed out of the rain because if you didn't stay out of the rain they'd come off. And you rolled your own cigarettes if you could buy the tobacco. What else.

MN: Why did you go to so many companies? Why didn't you stick with one of them?

JL: Well, you got laid off many times...There was seasonal, there was like the rush before Christmas, the let down right after the holidays...See if you were working for something that was sold at Christmas time you started in the summer and once the holidays were over well there's nothing else. We used to have a saying in french, "wait until after the holidays", but it was considered more of a joke than a wise saying, you know. And we kept saying "like to compare it to wait until next year for the Red Sox", it was like a joke like that, you know. Wait until after the holidays, wait until after the holidays. But, after the holidays didn't come for many years until Franklin D. Roosevelt, God bless his soul... came into power. He established a minimum wage oh and then the advent of social security in 1937...what else did he establish? Unemployment insurance. We had none of them under Hoover, under Republicans. The reason why unions came is the same reason why the United States united, abuse, abuse. They used to charge you more to get a haircut, you couldn't go into pool room. You have to go to church.

MN: Who taught you this?

JL: The owners, manufacturers, the bigshots.

MN: Would tell their workers?

JL: Uh.

MN: They would tell their workers they had to get a haircut?

JL: Slightly before my time. But in my time the abuses I got for instances looking for work. Went into one shop one morning he said, uh the super came by rushing through the offices we were in lucky to get into a warm office and he said are you looking for work. I says yuh. He said well keep right on looking. That was one remark I remembered all my life. Then we used to go to Heywoods...around winter time and it was cold and we'd get there at half past six in the morning and at 7:00 old man Andrews knew at 7 if they were going to need help cause the boss'd call him up and he'd let us stand there til 9, knowing that he wasn't going to hire anybody. By 7 he knew.

MN: What was the point of that?

JL: Oh, he was a mean old son-of-a-bitch, that's all.

MN: Was he the plant manager or something?

JL: No, he was like a personnel manager, personnel hirer or so forth. I walked into Heywoods in the morning at 7, punch a card, punch out at noon, punch in at 1, punch out at 4 at night and get a nickel (snickers).

MN: How so? How could that be?

JL: I don't know. I'd be in the assembly room for instance and if we were in a large truck of parts and if I wasn't there in my turn they went by me and next morning I'd have to get back in the line again that were waiting for work. So all day you stayed there because if you missed your turn, you didn't get no work.

MN: All the parts would come in and then you'd assemble them, but if you were in the bathroom or something someone else would

JL: Void. (laughs). You couldn't go. You couldn't miss your or I wouldn't go so far as to say if you were in the bathroom, but if you got sick and tired of waiting and went home, well if the work came in the ones that waited and if you waited all day and no work came in you didn't get no money.

MN: Would this be during the depression days?

JL: That's vague in my mind. It sure was before union days. Because they could do what they want, they could come up to you and say I don't like the way you comb your hair get...there was a little two-by-four union or hiring office.

MN: In what company?

JL: Heywoods. And this morning, for instance, they hired help and everybody got in line and as they walked in the office I was in back of this Polish fella, or Luthuanian, I don't know what was for sure, but I knew he was one or the other. And they asked or he asked for a job and they says "what", and he asked one question, "Is this piece-work or day-work," and they said, "You

don't want to work here, get out." He had the temerity, the boldness to ask whether it was going to be piece-work or day-work. But now don't get confused with this Andrews with Heywoods itself. He was a mean son-of-a-bitch on his own. Whether the shop knew it or not, I don't know. I don't know. But he was terrible.

MN: Did you work for Heywoods more than one time?

JL: Three separate times. (phone rings).

MN: And how long each time?

JL: The first two times I don't remember. But the last time I think I was there twenty-four years, maybe.

MN: Wow!

JL: But the first two times didn't count. We got a tremendous pension twenty-four years, I think I get thirty-three dollars. And they denied that when they folded, so the Government took it over.

MN: What was your uh, what was your skill, what did you do there?

JL: Let me see. I worked on all kinds of woodworking machines including assembling, boring, cutting, everything. At different times. Different times, different jobs. You did what you could get at that time, you know.

MN: Did you think of yourself as a craftsman?

JL: No. Because anybody could do what I could do. Now, some of my fellow workers, very few of them never rose beyond sweeping floors and cleaning toilets. You see, you had to be of a certain intelligence to stay in the shop to be a worker. You had to be a not stupid but not ambitious either. No. Because if you were ambitious and you wanted to better your life you wouldn't stay in a factory. Woodworkers were the lowest paid there was. Metal workers you took one jump up. If you worked on metal or presses or so forth and so on.

MN: So people would try to get into the metal from the woodshop.

JL: Not necessarily. You you took what you can get, what you could get, not. You didn't dictate. If you got a job, I don't care what. At one time

if you got a job at all it was...one of the things I think Roosevelt came along, he had government projects around, roads and bridges or just a manual worker and you got eleven dollars a week. That was considered real good. Two or three days work and if there was some extra money at the end of the month, you got another day and that was considered good. But you see...the type of people we had at that time, they were brought up to be subservient or to be quiet, don't make noise because if you do you ain't going to get anywhere. There was too much against you. In other words, they were I don't know what you'd call, they weren't physically abused, but they were abused mentally, you know, taught to accept. My father and mother were never educated and uh you see my type of people came from wherever they came from, France, because they were subject to abuse and they wanted to stay and be in a country where they wouldn't be. Well they came to Canada and they were abused some more. My type of people are uh independent. They want to do what they want to do when they want to do it how they want to do it. And uh, it seems they didn't find that in Canada under the English rule you know. So, when Canada, when this Englishman threw them all out. I mean a few stayed there I guess. Well they went all the way down the coast, way down to as far as Louisiana and they're still there, we're still there. You know, all over the place. Like horse shit in the stable, we're all over the place

MN: Do you remember what years, the when you worked there twenty-four years, what period of time that was, more or less??

JL: (.....unintelligible.)

MN: After World War II, really. (horn beeps)

JL: Let me see. I can give you an inkling. I retired from Heywood 1960.

MN: Oh, all right. And that's the time you had worked twenty-four years?

JL: Before. Previous to that.

MN: So, 1936 to 1960?

JL: It could very well be...You see I can say almost anything I want because who'd want to do anything to me, you know. How much time do I got left. What good would it do em, you know.

MN: And when you first started there they didn't have a union..

JL: Oh, no.

MN: In '36?

JL: No. Uh, when I first started there. I was working there before social security. That's when all my bad experiences were, you know. Not only me, I mean everybody was treated alike. I wasn't picked out to be abused. We were all in the same boat.

MN: And can you tell me just a little bit better like what do you mean, what kinds of ways they would treat you that you wouldn't like?

JL: Well...see at that time you were so used to being treated that way that you didn't even know you were abused. And finally discontent started to set amongst the workers. (.....unintelligible). They'd fire you for nothing, they'd lay you off without any notice. The abuse was not only that you were suddenly without money and a job but that there was no telling when. You were always on edge. You never knew when you were going told go home and stay there, you know. So the abuse began to creep into a person's mind slower and slower and finally the abuse. Look at Kentucky the gold the coal miners there. They were killed. Some they were brought the same idea only here was no violence. Down there they were violent people, you know. The same thing here only thing is we took, I don't know if we took longer to realize that we needed some kind of protection, some kind.

MN: Were the people in the shop talking amongst themselves about their complaints?

JL: Oh, yes. Small minor complaints. Bitching, bellyaching, you know.

Yuh. He did this and he did that and so forth and so on, like punching in and

out and not getting any money and showing up for work and it was zero (0) outside and if you didn't stand there you didn't get a job. And, uh, then finally management, let's say management finally abused the people so much that they'd form unions for protection of some kind, you know. And then Roosevelt came along and gave us more protection.

MN: Was it people inside the plant that wanted the union or was it people from outside that came in to try to organize?

JL: Let's say it was a meeting of mutual agreement, two minds, the outside people and the inside people. Uh. Of course, the inside people were not management. No bosses or superintendents or anything like that. They didn't want you here. But the workers did and the workers fire outnumbered the managers. They might have 500 workers in one plant, maybe 50 or 100 of them were management so, of course, naturally they were outnumbered. Eh, outnumbered not in that they were better or because management had more power naturally. So the discontent and the abuse, reigning violently in Kentucky. Really, there it was bad, you know. They'd bring in people who would club you to death in Kentucky or shoot you and do everything. They really had a lot of guts though there.

MN: Did the management in Heywoods do anything to try to stop the union from coming in?

JL: Oh, yeah. I guess they did. Well, I guess some kind of law was passed that you had a right to form a union. I think some kind of law and uh (phone rings) that made it possible to form unions. Because the law said you got to give the chance to people to work whether they want a union or not. There was some factories here in Gardner that everytime the union got a raise they raised their wages too. Collier-Keyworth was one of them. To keep the union out. And what these damn fools in Collier-Keyworth, for instance, didn't realize is is they were benefitting from the unions, because that company

didn't want a union so and then they even got more than we got. Just to keep the unions out, you see. They got more. If I said I got two dollars an hour in Heywoods through the union, if they got two dollars and ten cents that would keep the union out. Uh, it was..

MN: But Heywoods didn't do that?

JL: Uh, well, Heywoods formed a union, well they formed a union.

Collier-Keyworth's never did. The difference between two factories. In other words, unions benefitted people that didn't even belong to unions because they got the uh the benefit of not having to pay dues which was some gripe about

MN: You had to, you had to vote whether or not you wanted it right?

JL: Oh, yuh. Oh, yuh. Oh, yuh.

MN: And did you get the feeling in this shop that people wanted it, were afraid of it, how did they feel about it coming in?

JL: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Evidently they weren't afraid enough because they formed a union. So there must have been brave. Things must have been so bad to, you know.

MN: But you didn't have to belong? Some people belonged and some people didn't, right?

JL: That's right. Then they, Fred would explain that clause. You were, you could be hired without belonging to the union, but after a period of time you had to belong or else get out, you know. After a period of time. But, uh, the by-laws of the union, you see, a factory worker was so used to being abused that when they got a job once he got the job he didn't bellyache too much, he had a job, the union was in, he started getting benefits. When he got laid off he got wages, unemployment insurance and the money they took out of his social security for social security (.....unintelligible) someday he might want it and all that stuff, you know. All these small benefits that the average manual labor got that you never got before, so, hey,

take it, you know, vacation pays, Christmas holidays pay. You never got that.

MN: How did you start getting involved in the union?

JL: I didn't, I just was a member. I never...never was one of the organizers or anything like that. I just belonged and was satisfied to belong and uh like I said if it wasn't for a union you wouldn't have a country. So they brought the union on by themselves, by the way they treated the people. That's the English were treating the early Americanses bad so they revolted, and formed a union and they won so.

MN: And you felt it made a difference in your life to have it the union at the shop?

JL: Oh, sure. For the better. For the better. You see, a foreman had to watch his step more than he did before because I could put in a grievance and the union would go to bat for me.

MN: What would happen if, did you ever have a grievance?

JL: Umm, I don't remember whether I did. I know plenty of my fellow workers did, you know.

MN: Can you give me an example?

JL: Well, let me give you one out and out that you were laid off and you shouldn't have been. Somebody should have been laid off before you.

MN: Because you have seniority.

JL: Or something like that. Yuh, under the union rules you shouldn't have been laid off. Now, you could go six months, a year and not work and if your grievance was good they'd pay you all the way back to how long you were out. Stuff like that. I just give you a, that's a black and white grievance, you know, if you were laid off and you shouldn't have been. And the union won and then they had arbitrators, not union, not pro-management, but arbitrators. One was from Durham, New Hampshire, a college town and they paid him a good sum of money and he'd look all the facts over and then decide. He was

supposed to be fair and as far as I know he was. But that's one like if you won it paid you all the wages back to the time you were out. That's where bosses and management get a little uh they don't like to be told. But this isn't like that. But, eh, I guess in the back of their minds that they must treat the people more like human beings than just robots, you know.

MN: Oh, one of the things that I don't know if this is true but somebody told me that uh they had social clubs at Heywood-Wakefield and that the newspaper, the shop news, and that was so the people would feel more loyal to the company.

JL: Well, yuh, I suppose so. But I told the president's wife that if they gave me two packs of cigarettes every month instead of that newspaper I'd appreciate it more.

MN: Oh, the newspaper didn't mean much to you?

JL: No. You read it one time. Oh yeah and they used to have a banquet and give out pins. I told them I'd rather have the price, you know, I got five year pin, ten year pins, twenty year pins, I guess I got. Anyway, uh, one Polish fella got up at the banquet and he almost cried because

(.....unintelligible) telling the President Greenwood who was sitting at the head table how we appreciated it, being given the right to work in Heywood-Wakefield. Oh, you know, he was kissing his ass (laughs) right in front of everybody else and he disgusted everybody, you know like that, you know. Because even when the unions were in there was still problems and problems like being laid off and other grievances, you know, injuries...being hurt, whether you got hurt in the shop or whether you got hurt outside you had to prove it; safety apparatus on your press for instance to stop you from cutting your fingers off, whether there was one or whether there wasn't a safety gadget, so different things, different things. And, if you were fired you better, the company better have a good reason. And that you were fired in many cases you were given a written notice which you never had to before

unions, then you were given on the second offense a week off, which wasn't a killer by itself and the third time you were fired. But I guess they had to be all on the same offenses, (chuckle) if you were given a written notice for one thing and the next time it was another thing, then you had to be given another written notice, but if all the offenses were the same, written notice, a week off and then fired. Whew, you never got that treatment before unions. Oh, and I never darkened my eyes again.

MN: Never darken your eyes again?

JL: That's a saying I made up. Do you know how to say potatoes in french?

MN: Pompatere?

JL: French fries.

MN: Pom frit (both laugh).

JL: French fries. Pom fritere is correct. Uh, I know a guy that chased a girl till she caught him. That's why there's so many married men. Uh, what else?

MN: What else.

JL: In other words management brought on unions.

MN: Could the people feel the loyal to um Richard Greenwood?

JL: She was an alcoholic. He had to divorce her I guess or something.

MN: Who? He was or she was?

END TAPE ONE, SIDE A

TAPE ONE, SIDE B

MN: Okay, tell me about Mr. Greenwood again. He was a

JL: He was a very nice man and polite, genials, smile while you shook hands with you if there was a reason for it, but he was God almighty. And well he would stoop to speak with you politely and everything, but it didn't mean a

damn thing. You still went back to work and he went into the higher office. Of course, management never did say a word against him, never, never. And even when the company was going broke he was making his money. The company was going down the drain, they were all making their money. Oh say this for the worker, if I as a worker fouled up, after the union, it was covered up. If I fouled up some work, it was covered up. That was nice thing about that. They get to be like a family and nobody wanted to be responsible for anybody losing their jobs. They got to be too friendly, you know.

MN: What, because of the union?

JL: Partly, but mostly because nobody wanted to uh be responsible, this is a small town and you'd meet each other on the street every day. Well, what if you got me fired, even though the cause was right, then you and I'd meet on the street every day and I'd say there's the son-of-a-bitch that got me fired. So it got to be something like that. I don't know what you'd call it. It was because you were doing me a favor that you didn't get me fired, I don't know why, maybe you didn't want that on your conscience or you didn't want to meet me on the street every day or you would have to avoid where I go. You'd have to go somewhere else. If you went to a diner and you saw me in there time and time again you'd go to another one. So I guess it was a case, I don't know what you'd call that.

MN: But that didn't have anything to do with the union or not. That was

JL: No, no.

MN: That was small town atmosphere.

JL: Small town, small town atmosphere or you know.

MN: Did you belong to the social club?

JL: I don't think so. I never went to their affairs. No, I didn't belong.

I think some of it was mostly promoted by management, mostly, mostly. I don't remember, you know, too much about it because I went in and worked, I went out

and went home and did what I wanted. As far as I was concerned, I was there to work and get paid and that's all, that's all I wanted. I wanted to be my ownself outside of the shop. I didn't want to be going to these. The only time I went to meetings was when it was union meetings, to vote for whatever.

MN: So you didn't go to the corn roast or?

JL: Not if I could help it. But, if it was free, I'd go. Free transportation, free this, free that, yup, why not.

MN: Did you feel loyal to the company? (noise in outer office) I'm going to shut the door, I'll be right back.

JL: I don't know whether I felt loyal to the company or not. ...I didn't abuse the company in the sense of I would lose my job. I had a job, I wanted to keep it and I worked there and that was it. Whether I felt loyalty or not I don't know, I don't know. I just wanted, I had a job, you know, and that's all. You see they weren't benefitting me anymore than I was benefitting them. They gave me a job and I gave them profits. So why, you know, it's a mutual affair. I did the work they sold, they made a profit and they paid me out of the profits and where was the loyalty. I was more loyal to my union than I was to the company if that's what you call loyalty. Because they did more for me in my personal life than the company did, but I did, I worked. Like I told my brother who worked at East Gardner State Colony for the mental, I says, "You people up there," I says to my brother, "You don't make a product and sell it." So, I says, "Everything comes out of the taxpayers. You don't make a chair or stove." So, I says, "The money you're getting paid up there is a total loss." But, I says, "Our manufacturer or people like me when I make a chair and they sell it and they make a profit and they pay me and." But, I says, "You people are a total loss up there, you know. There's a difference." So why should I be loyal in the sense of that I would have liked to put out good work, that loyalty. In other words, hey if I didn't put up good work the company wouldn't sell.

MN: Did you care about the quality of the chair?

JL: I did. But many uh the last few years, five or ten years, the day workers, the ones that shipped out the furniture and the ones that took in the bad one didn't seem to, they didn't seem to do their job. The bosses would uh see a piece of furniture, expensive, with a crack in it they'd send it out anyway. Uh, they should never have done that. They should never have done that. They had what they call quality control and it'd be a person looking at the (.....unintelligible) whatever it was and it didn't mean anything because the bosses would send it out in that condition.

MN: What changed that they would at one time really care and then uh?

JL: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know why it changed that way it just went downhill. The quality, the quality more than anything else I guess.

MN: But you (.....unintelligible) you you performed I mean you cared that the furniture was high quality?

JL: Well, of course, of course, I did the best I could. And, you see, if it was wrong, it should have been stopped and thrown out, but they shipped it anyway. Management. And I heard from some sources that the stockholders, the Heywoods, the Greenwoods, they they got their share before everything went down the drain. That's the way I heard it, but to prove any of it, I wouldn't know for sure. But, that's about covers everything on it or doesn't it?

MN: Well, there's a few more questions.

JL: Oh, really.

MN: You aren't tired are you?

JL: What?

MN: You aren't tired are you?

JL: No.

MN: Okay. Uh, do you remember, this is a hard question to answer, but, were there a lot of changes in the company while you were there? Like, I know in 1940 they brought in a conveyor.

JL: Well, a few moments like that, but there were... well like a conveyor. Instead of passing it on by hand you put it on a hook and it went to the next.

MN: Did it make much difference?

JL: I really don't know. It's supposed to have done the difference. Well, I suppose it did improve uh not the worker but it improved the efficiency. But I guess all in all there remained a...what do you call, there remained old style, you know. And there was as much as five floors in one building and all this, you know, today it's one floor, you know, the new factories and all that, it's one floor and ehh, the cost of operating was tremendous. Far beyond what if, you know, it had all been on one level. Up and down the stairs, elevators, old-fashion elevators, up and down, up and down. The conveyor that they put in went from one floor to probably three or four floors, you know. Well, I suppose that'd help, but that was costly.

MN: Oh, what about these timers? These. You didn't. Did you work on piece work or day rate?

JL: Piece work most of the time.

MN: So you'd have to have these guys come in and time you, right?

JL: Yeah, yeah. I want to say something. Uhhh, I got the guys in my room doing it and when a timer'd come by, even if he wasn't going to time, he'd walk into the main to the office and I got everybody saying when he'd walk "prick". And, there was nothing he could do about it. How's he going to prove what he you was saying, you know, they are almost under your breath, you know. So we had them the timid ones would be brow beaten but the ones that had guts at times saw the they uh fought back, you know. By fighting back I meant they gave you a timing and if you went fast when you were timed that was your problem, if you went slow, well, you got a better price. And some of the people I worked were so scared of timers that they'd get terrible piecework prices, you know. They were terrible.

MN: So they were afraid of the timers?

JL: Yeah. They were. Anytime, eh almost every worker almost everyone was afraid of them, what they'd do to you see. They'd give you ten percent or something or the other, what is it going to the bathroom or but it didn't mean nothing, you know. They'd time you and you couldn't make a false move.

MN: Could you fool them? Did people try to?

JL: I couldn't. I mean I have on some occasions, you know. For instance, I was sanding something see. I had a truck over here with the stock and I had a truck over here to put the stock on, well I'd take it, sand it, and put it there, take it, sand it and put it there. Well, I took it, sand it and put it there, picked up a piece, sand it and put it there. So instead of making a false move over there, as I put the piece back I'd pick another one up. And when you do thousands of pieces that adds up. See, little tricks like that, you know.

MN: So you would get a better rate.

JL: I'd get a better rate... Yup.

MN: And did they were they always around? I mean the whole time you worked there, there were always timers?

JL: Oh yeah, oh, uh, uh I don't know. Once they timed the job, that was it, then they weren't around no more. I offered one to go out in the alley and have it out with him one time. He stood in back of me without me knowing it and I'm working on the job he's going to time, and when I turned around there he was. And I started calling him names and telling him he had no business not letting me know that he was there, you know.

MN: They were like spies.

JL: Oh, they were pro-companies (laughs), if that's what, very much so. That was their job anyway. You couldn't blame them in a way...but they were not liked.

MN: And would people file the grievances because of this?

JL: Oh, yuh, you could file a grievance when your price you got. After the unions though, not before the union. Yeah, you could file a grievance. Many times a boss would have all kinds of close friends, relatives that he brought in. How are you going to fire them. Even without a union. (laughs) Fire your son-in-law, your daughter-in-law or good friend you meet at the club, that'd hurt the company, so you had to beg someone months or so. And there was stuff in their pile of stuff that would just stored away down there and they burned it.

MN: Who burned it?

JL: (.....unintelligible). Firemen or people around the furnaces fuel power for the shop or whatever you want to call them.

MN: On purpose?

JL: Yeah, yeah, it was junk.

MN: Oh, it was junk.

JL: Well, I don't know what you call junk or junk, but there no evidence like when you cremate a person if you were done foully the evidence was gone.

That's why when you cremate a person today you have to wait a week in case.

Well there the foul-up jobs were brought down the cellar and eventually burned and nobody said a word about it.

MN: Oh, so management wouldn't know.

JL: Well, management up to a certain level there were the bosses knew it.

One time I came to the clock a few minutes ahead of time, which I shouldn't have done, and this fella says, "Joe there's a little time clock here," wraps his arm around it. I didn't know this. So when I came to punch he was standing near it, so I picked him up by the hips and I flung him. When I did, he didn't let go of the clock, so the clock went flying through the air.

Well, now there was four or five people around that clock now that were all

involved. So the clock split in half. It was a Simplex time-clock. Then the boss came over to me. See, I had a line of bullshit too. I says, "Guava, you's a good fella a good fella." I says, "Guava, you can tell me when I can punch out and when I can't. But," then I says, "nobody else can." I says, "If you would have told me I can't punch out, I'd say you're the boss, but," I said "this guy and your relatives and friends, they got no business telling me whether I can punch out or punch in, whatever. It's none of their business." He thought about that (laughs) for a few minutes, then he walked off. So they hushed it up. You got a you got it to have eh, eh, a kind of a find a little loophole, you know, like I told him, "You are the only one that can tell me whether I can punch in or not," you know. And stuff like that. Yuh, I was smart in some ways and very stupid in others (laughs). Oh, yeah, you know. In some ways I was clever and then it ohh, I was saying only fools are positive and I'm damn sure of that (both laugh). Oh yeah, you know, in order to live your life at times you have to be clever, you know. You have to use your head at times, you even know when to back off or when to go ahead, you know. And you make many mistakes as the old saying goes, 'that's why erasers are on pencils'.

MN: Yeah. What about these suggestions the company was always trying to get people to submit. Labor suggestions (hard to interpret, JL talked over this).

JL: They were they were favorable, yeah, you'd put a suggestion in and you'd get an award I guess, yeah. I think so. They weren't too bad. But you only suggested it because of the payment, you know. Because you got five dollars or ten dollars or whatever. I you eh I don't even remember the amounts, but you did it because you might get an extra bill in your pocketbook. There was nothing wrong with that, I guess.

MN: There was one other thing sort of an important thing I wanted to ask you about and that was, do you remember the, they had a series of strikes at the company?

JL: Well, it's the old story about a strike. Everybody is a worker and the workers are always in debt, they owe, they bought a car, they bought a home and they owed. Well, how long you going to go without money. So in some cases one strike I remember lasted quite a while. I don't know how long, it was, finally the workers had to settle for whatever they were offered but no gain. But it was a foolish strike, you know. I think you could blame that on the union.

MN: Do you know why there was striking?

JL: More money. That's about it. More money was more or less the whole thing. Money.

MN: Because there was a strike right when you were leaving, 1960. Right?

JL: I don't remember the years. I thought there was

MN: There was one in the '50's too wasn't it?

JL: I thought there might have been more than one.

MN: Probably there were.

JL: But, see those things, as the years go by, like I said I worked at twenty-five factories in Gardner and as the years go by you kind of lose track of all the exact dates, the months, the years, you know. I think I'm fortunate in being the way I am at this age, you know. I think I am cause there are many uh people my age that well they don't even reach it, you know. And, uh, if they do they get sort of senile and dottering around, physically unable to wheelchairs, crutches, eh, all that so.

MN: But there's no strike that stands out in your mind as being particularly.

JL: Yeah, well there was one, but I don't remember what year it was.

MN: Well it doesn't matter. Can you tell me about what happened?

JL: Well, the finally the worker run out of every resource he had and he'd have to settle for what the company offered in the first place. That was quite a long strike. It seems to me it was.

MN: Were you out on strike too?

JL: Well everybody was. Everybody.

MN: Did you walk the picket line?

JL: I guess I did, yuh.

MN: And would people cross the picket line to go to work?

JL: Jesus, I don't think so. I think Heywood's is a kind of a company that that if everybody didn't show, nobody showed. I think they were that kind of company. One time Heywood-Wakefield came out and said there's a few people in here who've been here all their lives and the union was in there many years and they told the few that didn't belong to join. They didn't want these. I had a guy working with me right in the same department, the same room, who had never belonged to the union and never would and he was getting all the benefits that I was getting and he wasn't paying dues, so finally he shocked me, one day Heywood management came out and said all those that don't belong have to belong. It was like a command, you know. Now, these people that didn't belong if they said no, they had the right to say no, but they were so chicken shit that (laughs) they joined because the company was all powerful. So the company told them to join, they joined and started paying dues. And in the meantime, all those years that they didn't belong they were getting the benefits we were getting. I told a few of them, I said, "Well, why don't you refuse the benefits. If you don't want to belong to the union, why don't you," this is one of those little clever things I thought up, "If you don't want to pay the dues and belong to the union, why do you accept the benefits we get. You get one more holiday a year or you get eh an extra week of vacation," I says, "Why do you take those things." Well, they had no answer for that obviously. They didn't belong, they didn't pay dues, but they got all our benefits. I said, "Why do you take them?," oh, I don't know no answer for that, (laughs) oh, I don't know.

MN: So you must have er have resented those guys.

JL: In a way, me personally, I strongly, you know, I said uh I don't know how many of those guys there were, there might have been one out of every fifty or maybe one or two out of every hundred or something like that.

MN: Oh, so not very many.

JL: No, no. There were. You want to crack your camera?

MN: Yeah. I do (laughs). It'll only take a second now. But you have some great uh expressions and I wanted to take while you're talking to me (laughs).

JL: Why not.

MN: Uh, somebody else told me that if they knew someone that crossed the picket line that would be the end of the friendship because the strike made so many bitter feelings between people.

JL: Bitterness dies in everybody like anything else, you know, over a period of time. But as far as crossing the picket line, I'm trying to remember. I don't think anybody ever crossed a picket line. The foremans, management, yuh. Oh, the workers saw a manager, a foreman or superintendent or somebody cross the line, hey, that was his prerogative. There was no problem there. But, I don't remember what was, in fact if they crossed the picket line I imagine I wouldn't remember that. I don't remember anyone doing it. Hey, there was other strikes in other parts of the country that they did cross the line. They brought in scabs but Heywood never did. Heywood's wasn't that good but they weren't that bad either. Because they negotiated and met with the union official and, no they weren't that bad, no, as far as uh going by the law, they weren't, I think they went by the law, you know. If eh, if the union and the company agreed to meet at a binding table, they met. I think Heywood's was good enough for that, you know. They didn't bring in, they didn't use any dirty tricks as far as I know they didn't, you know. Like I say in Kentucky when they brought in scabs and clubs and guns and all that. I don't think

Heywood's ever was, I'm trying to remember whether they were ever unfair in negotiating with the union. I don't think they ever were. I think they met and argued and talked. As far as I know they did. To me they were good enough for that.

MN: Did it did it matter to you that it was a family business instead of a big corporation?

JL: Well, being a worker and manual laborer and all that, uh, high-falutin ideas didn't come into my mind uh thinking beyond my work I didn't bother. Uh, I worked, I made a product, they sold it, they paid me, they made a profit and uh. I didn't feel they were doing me any favors and I hoped they didn't think I was doing them a favor. They were profitting on my work, I was profitting getting paid, so. Loyalty.

MN: How come you left in 1950?

JL: Well, that's basic. I never liked to work. I hated it all my life. And the first chance I had to quit working, beautiful, I quit. This had nothing to do with the company. It only had to do with me. I hate to work. I hated never liked to work. Probably for one thing, probably I never was too good at it, you know. But my retiring early and quitting work, you'll notice I didn't go to work anywhere else either.

MN: Oh, that was your last job?

JL: Yes. I took a little jobs, eh, like uh little jobs, so many hours a week as janitor at the old age place there. (.....unintelligible) little things like that, that didn't interfere with my life too much. Like janitor you can come in when everybody's gone and you can come in when you want and all that. But to like work, I hated it, I hated it and it had nothing to do with Heywood's that I quit, nothing. And they were just as glad to get rid of me. I got all kinds of cooperation. Oh, yuh, as far as letting me go and all that, oh beautiful (laughs), go.

MN: They didn't try to convince you to stay?

JL: No, no, no, no and I didn't want them to, either. Cause uh maybe I gave them a hard time when things weren't right, you know, but they eh... They didn't want to make waves with me too much because probably I'd make trouble, you know. I don't know if you'd call it a troublemaker, but I'd fight back, you know. So they were just as glad to get rid of me as I was to get rid of them. But it was not Heywood's, I just hated to work that's all. It wasn't Heywood's. Heywood's was probably more fair in many ways than uh.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B

TAPE TWO, SIDE A

JL: In Heywood's that you wouldn't get anywhere else.

MN: Uh, would you say you think a lot of people got breaks in Heywood's that they wouldn't get somewhere else?

JL: That's right. I think so.

MN: Like what breaks.

JL: Well, if you did something wrong... Am I on the air?

MN: Yup.

JL: That you were an alcoholic and you drank a lot they'd forgive you a lot. Heywood's did. I don't know why they were good to drunks or alcoholics if you want to be polite. They were good to them. They would usually forgive them a lot and I'll, I'll never know the reason why.

MN: You mean if they didn't show up for work or something like that.

JL: Yuh. They, they, they, you know, I used to puzzle about that. They'd forgive you a lot if you were a drunk. I never was, I always showed up. That don't put no medal on me, but the point I'm making is that they seem to forgive the drinkers, the alcoholics a lot. Whatever reason, whatever

reasons. The president, he's down there on Cape Cod, he's a millionaire and me I'm broke (laughs). Wishing that describes the situation.

MN: But you had to take wage cuts during some of the time you were there.

Like wouldn't they sometimes ask you if you would accept a wage reduction?

JL: No. I don't think Heywood's ever done that. They just wouldn't give you anymore or I don't remember Heywood's ever asking you to take a cut. I don't. I can't remember, if it ever happened, I can't remember it. But when you'd ask for more that's when they were adamant, I know. But I don't ever remember Heywood's ever asking you to take a cut. I don't remember that. If it ever happened, I can't remember it. Or they, you know, this Heywood mistreatment seemed to hinge on one person, this Andrews. He was a son-of-a-bitch, you know. He, and I don't know whether management knew it or not. But he made life miserable before unions, he made life miserable. But I don't think that was a Heywood policy. I think it was just his own private affair.

MN: But once you got hired, you didn't have to would go to the waiting room or anything, you just showed up for work.

JL: That's all.

MN: And you didn't get laid off those twenty-four years?

JL: Let me see, uh, instead of laying me off they'd put me in another department temporarily. In other words, the shop was so big that they could find a hole for me and some other department, doing what I didn't know a thing about, well they'd still put me there.

MN: Was that when you'd be on piece-work?

JL: No.

MN: Oh that'd be day-rate.

JL: Yeah. And then, hey Heywood's would, you know, (chuckles) now that I think of it, they weren't all that miserable, uh if there was lay-off coming,

even though I wasn't due to be laid off, I could ask them to lay me off and collect unemployment checks and they would cooperate. But.

MN: Did you do that?

JL: Oh yeah. I've asked to be laid off, I hated (chuckles) come back to me hating work.

MN: So you would get.

JL: There was, you know, many good things about Heywood's that in small ways, like asking to be laid off ahead of your turn, eh, they'd cooperate. Yeah, they were, I may be painting them too black, you know. They were good in many ways, many ways. Yeah, they were.

MN: And, um.

JL: We was like family, you know. It never was you'd forgive more likely than forgive a friend or a relative or somebody you meet everyday on the week for twenty-five years or whatever. Oh yeah, they weren't all black like I've heard of some companies in this country as being, you know, they weren't that, they weren't that black, no. But I guess it wasn't good for the factory, you know, to forgive dirty work, I mean bad work, it wasn't, it probably wasn't good for the factory. But they did it. Like me busting the clock or somebody doing bad work or an alcoholic that don't show up sometimes, you know. Yuh, they weren't all that black. And the combination of union and friendship, it was quite a force on you, the mentality of the management and the people. The union who wanted the men to watch their steps and the friendship that developed between management, workers and management people and workers and there was some people who'd you never reach, the comptroller of the company. But you know what that is, I think he buys and sells everything. You never reach him, you would have nothing to do with him at all. No way, there was no reason to, and the president, there was no reason, reason for you to ever even have anything to do with him. So it got down to the lower levels. The

bosses, you know. And, uh, they were, they weren't all that black, you know. They weren't all the, I don't know if you'd ever call them dirty, they were never dirty.

MN: Wouldn't Greenwood go walk around the plant every Monday morning saying hi to everybody?

JL: Well if he did he was very pleasant. You could stop him and talk to him. He was very good about that. A big smile. Yuh, he was a very pleasant man. Uh, I remember one time I injured my leg outside, which I made it plain because I didn't hurt it inside, so I asked if I could use the office elevator to get up to my fourth floor I guess it was and they okayed it, so I'd ride up with the president sometimes and he'd be nice to me, smile, you know, good morning and all that, but he wouldn't have anything to say to me and I didn't have anything to say to him of interest to both of us, you know. But he was very eh pleasant, very pleasant man, you know.

MN: Did you used to read his president's message?

JL: Yeah, there was some kind of a president's, presidential message of some kind. I guess he was in a lofty tower, he didn't... A worker's a worker and the president's the president. How can the two meet, you know. They were there to earn their money and he was there to make money and I don't know, what the hell.

MN: Do you know why the company closed?

JL: I would blame management all the way. I would think so. It's one thing if the president said one time, he should go to Europe. He said the European workers were much better than the American workers. (laughs) That didn't set very well. He brought over a little thing that there was a, I don't know, a piece of junk. We worked in bent woods, they called it ashcraft, you take a straight piece of wood, you steam it, and then you put it in a form and bend it, and when it dries it stays in that form. Well he brought one of those

junky things claiming that it would do better work and they went to the boss and they couldn't go around and say it was no good, but he put them away and forgot it (chuckles) just left it stay there till one day it disappeared, I don't know. But we laughed at that. It was a big joke. He brought this from Europe, said how far ahead they are, you know (laughs) geez. But, no, Greenwood, I don't, uh, uh, I can't say that I ever remember Heywood's pulling dirty tricks. I don't, I can't say that. Like I said they were very good to the alcoholics and the many mistakes by the workers were hushed up, you know, swept under the rug. No, no, I can't say that.

MN: But you were saying why the company closed.

JL: Management, I don't think they did their job. For instance, if I kept fouling up and fouling up why wasn't I got rid of, and why did if I fouled up that piece of chair, why was it shipped out. It shouldn't have been, because it's only going to come back, it was a revolving door, send it out (chuckles) and bringing it back, send it out, get it back. I understand management took advantage of the money there was, but see that's too much for me, that's financial. To me one times nothing is nothing and two times nothing must be something because it's twice as much as one times nothing, but it's really it's nothing. So management and finance, eh, that's over my head. I never went to school much, you know. Sixth grade I guess. The only thing I've benefitted me is that I love to read, so I picked up a lot of baloney in my reading. I used to read two, three books a day.

MN: A day!

JL: From the library, yuh.

MN: Even when you were working?

JL: When I was a kid, ten, twelve, fourteen years old, two books a day. I can still remember the old lady librarian making sure my hands if they were clean or dirty, if they were dirty I didn't get no books and I was what they

call ten, twelve years old like a ragamuffin, you know. My brother's pants eh all that poor slob, you know. I'm not that being pity and all, I'm just saying how it was. I used to read two or three books a day. That's before they invented speed reading. I'd read everything.

MN: And do you still read as an adult?

JL: Nope, I uh, sort of, uh, because my eyes are going. I can't read anything like I used to, you know. So what I read now is the track sheet.

MN: But I mean before your eyes started going did you read?

JL: Oh, I'd read many kinds of books, many kinds, all kinds. Even if they were fiction or fact, you know.

MN: I'm going to open the door and I've got one more question for you.

JL: Really?

MN: Yeah.

JL: Really.

MN: (.....unintelligible, opening door).

JL: No I can't paint, I can't paint Heywood's all black. It's impossible, because they were, they were er in some ways very good, they were in some ways very good. You might have say that you might have been loyal to them for that fact, that they never pulled no dirty tricks, not that I can remember. It might have happened to some individual that I don't know of, you know. What's your last question or whatever?

MN: Well, the last thing I wanted to ask you about was if they treated men and women differently in the company.

JL: ...No. I don't think so. The women were harder workers than the men, they were. You know a young girl would go into Heywood's at twenty years old and then thirty, thirty-five she was all shot to hell, because of her own fault though. She was money hungry for one, so she worked like a horse and, you know, I don't want to belittle the women in that sense of the word, but

they weren't physically able to use all that strength over a period of years, fifteen, twenty years of working like piece-work like a mad dog, you know, and that took it out on them and they aged a long time before they should have. You know what I mean? And that's not belittling them, it's just that they weren't built to take that abuse like a man might be.

MN: So the men would be a little bit more relaxed about the work, do you think?

JL: I don't know what you mean by relaxed, uh. They could take the abuse better, physically, you know. You know my philosophy about women is that when a female was born she has two strikes against her already. (noise from the corridor). First, she can't hit and run. Secondly, one week out of every month she's out of business. But I will admit she's smarter up here and she has more tricks on her side until she falls in love and then forget it, then the third strike comes in. When she falls in love with all those other defects she's gone. That's my philosophy. But I do uh I do, uh, as far as the female union, all their mentality and their tricks I think it's fine.

MN: But there were no women bosses in the company.

JL: Bosses, no. Bosses in the office, women bosses, they were tough. The women didn't like to be bossed by a woman.

MN: But what about in the shop?

JL: Oh, I don't ever remember one woman boss over the laborers, if that's what you mean, no.

MN: Cause weren't some jobs more or less for women in the shop? And there were some men's jobs.

JL: I don't think it was any difference.

MN: Well, yeah, but weren't most of the women did the uh, uh sewing.

JL: The what.

MN: You know, upholstery. Did they do the sewing for the upholstery?

JL: Men and women alike.

MN: So there were no areas that were just.

JL: To the best of my knowledge to answer your question, if a women could do it, she would do it.

MN: But did they, were they all over the place. I mean, were there women in burning in and assembly?

JL: Well, they probably tried to, Heywood's was like eh, eh, tried to avoid giving a woman a dangerous job, Where she could cut her fingers off or break a leg or something like that. I think they, she had, like I'm saying Heywood's wasn't all black, you know painted black and I think there was one woman with long hair got her hair got in a machine, tore up almost her whole scalp off, you know and, uh, I think that they kind of didn't want to give women dangerous jobs. Not because they were against women, but because it was dangerous, you know or if you have to lift fifty pounds many, many times a day they didn't care to give the women that, even though the women wanted it. They didn't, you know. I think they had more or less respect for the women in that sense. They weren't that bad that way. What the disrespect of women was that uh amongst the workers, because I hate to say this, but they were money hungry. They'd kill themselves to make a buck, oh, they were ferocious, much more than the men. They wanted that dollar and they, they really worked at it, you know. So their own fault because uh they'd age, you know, this wear and tear on them everyday, piece-work, work, work, work, you know. And they'd have a, they'd handle some fairly heavy stuff and, uh, they'd age long before their time, you know.

MN: Were their better and worse jobs in the factory?

JL: They were good at their work.

MN: No, but I mean were there jobs that people wanted, like stain-wiping I don't think people wanted.

JL: Well, you were, you, the job was posted on the wall and you bid and the top seniority got it. They were fair on that. Oh, no. Maybe I've been painting Heywood's too black, but, uh, the black usually, mostly comes from this particular person and before unions. After unions things would, you know. If there was a job they'd put it up there. I remember one time this good job was posted, I could go on day-work and it said underneath "no experience needed". I think at that time I probably was right up on the top of the whole factory in seniority, you know, and two bosses and a suit and the personnel manager tried to come over to me and talk me out of it, you know. And the more they'd talk me out of it, the more I wanted the job and finally they had to give in and give me the job, which they didn't want me to have because they had a particular person in mind for that job. But they stuck by the rules. So, I say, in many senses, after the union, they were very, very good to people, fair and that wasn't only because of the union, it was because of everybody knew everybody else. No, they weren't that, that black. It might have been that this particular person, Andrews, he didn't give Heywood's a good name, you know. They should have found him out. They should have done something with him, you know.

MN: But they must have had other bad eggs? You know. He wasn't the only one.

JL: None as bad as him. No, I don't know, I, you see he stood out so much that I can't think of anybody else. Well, like you say, like I said I used to punch in morning, noon and night and get no money. Who's fault was that. The boss was fair, if it was my load of furniture to put together he, it was my load, he hired others, you know.

MN: That was before the union, right?

JL: Yuh, yuh. Definitely before the union.

MN: And did things change in World War II also? Were you there in World War II?

JL: Yuh. See they turned me down in the service for some reason or the other. Like they'd interview you at the army there place, he asked me how I felt about being turned down, I said, "Well, I'm not happy of why I was turned down, but I'm happy because I was. Why go and get killed if I didn't have to." "Well" he says, "That's a pretty good answer." Then there's those old joke about looking out the window in the psychologist says to me, uh, "Possible soldier," he says, uh, "What would you do if you saw a submarine coming down the street going to attack you?". And the man said, "Well I'd pull out a cannon and shoot him." He said, "Where would you get the cannon?" He said, "The same place you got the submarine." (both laugh, JL coughs twice). A little joke thrown in free. But, anyways where were we, Heywood's?

MN: In World War II. Weren't there a lot of women there in World War II?

JL: Oh yuh, yuh. Working on bombs, bomb fuses and so forth. Oh yes, a lot of workers, a lot of workers. And, uh, I worked in the third old war works for eighty-five cents an hour.

MN: I thought the wages were better during the war.

JL: Well, possibly I could live on eighty-five cents an hour, but that's where I worked. I don't know if it was that I wanted to be part of, uh, war work or I just worked for eighty-five cents an hour and.

MN: Uh, did you work on bomb fuses?

JL: On what?

MN: Bomb fuses.

JL: Yeah, at a part of munitions you worked. You know, see, some of those women in there they were working piece-work and some of them would take it out on the male. See they could tell me what to do. They weren't supposed to lift something heavy, I had to do it and they were, some of them were vicious. They were spiteful. For once they were over the man, you know. For once and they were pretty spiteful, pretty vicious. Not all of them, but

a few of these women. You open the door or I'll tell the boss, so, I was in no danger of being fired, they needed me. But, I didn't, no, they didn't take it out on me or my person morally, they did, you know. Two, three or four, a half a dozen of these women, like one day this beautiful girl she was fragile and beautiful and her husband was away overseas in the war, and I walked in with two cartons of cigarettes, which was very difficult to get, and she said, "Oh, you're hoarding," so I looked her up and down and said, "Look what you're hoarding." She just turned around and walked off (chuckles). So you have to have some remarks, you know, be a little clever. Like I said, a little clever at times. All that beauty and nobody was using it. I said, "Look what you're hoarding."

MN: And what happened to them after the war? Did they stay at the factory?

JL: No. No. They didn't go for it. Not many women went to that factory business, you know. It's hard work and most of it is piece-work. Management, oh, that's all right, you can sit behind a desk and just scribble away or whatever you do, you know. But, no, they were happy to get the hell out of that and go back to being married or looking for getting married, you know what I mean. And there wasn't that much jobs for them either. Once war work went out, oh, you know, seventy-five percent of the jobs went out with the window too.

MN: Yuh, didn't a lot of people get laid off after the war?

JL: Oh, yeah. But they stayed laid off because they wanted to. The women I mean. (more talking in the outer office). They found out that working for a living ain't that funny in a factory.

MN: No, but a lot of men got laid off too, didn't they?

JL: Well, they did as well as they good that's all. Well, for answer to that one, eh, you see a lot of stuff was not made during the war, furniture, stoves, so on. All these factories come burning back for that line of work

that wasn't being made during the four years of the war, now. There was a need for it, you know, stoves and furniture and ice boxes and cars and all that stuff that hadn't been made, like I worked eh, eh, in the place where they made carriage for, carriages for babies, you know, naturally. And there was some metal carriages and junk so I had one made up and I sent it to my nephew who was married and had a baby to Hartford. I sent it down by bus and as she's wheeling the carriage along during the war everybody wants to know where she got it, that metal carriage. But it was a special thing that I saw in the factory I worked in. In other words, it'd be carriages were being made out of wood and very fragile, you know, they didn't last worth a damn, you know. And things like that, so, all that stuff that wasn't being made during the war now there was a need for it. And there was money around, so. No, uh, uh, I, I feel bad about calling Heywood's all those dirty names when uh they were so good in many other ways, you know. Many other ways they were good. They weren't like these factories that are down south that I read about, heard about, you know.

MN: What about today, do you think the factories in Gardner.

JL: Huh?

MN: Do you think the factories are good to their help in Gardner today?

JL: Yeah, I think so. Geez, right here in back of me there's eight to ten to twelve dollars an hour.

MN: That's a job.

JL: Yeah. They're giving good money. They're not quitting their jobs. Oh, there's always a, there's always these screwballs that, you know, everything comes from inside of you. If you kick that thing there, that comes from inside of you. So, if I take out my spite on you it comes from inside of this, it's not you see, it's me. And, uh, these screwballs that have no intentions of working, don't want to work and they're mad at the world because

they lack something, whatever it is, they take it out by kicking people around and hollering, they don't last in the factories. And as far as that goes, the young generation are not workers like they were years ago. No way.

MN: No.

JL: No, they don't want to work. Look at the jobs that are begging right here in Gardner.

MN: That's what I was going to ask you. Why can't they get help in the factories today?

JL: Kids don't want to work no more. They're a combination of getting it anyway, uh, I don't know. They just don't want to work. They don't want to earn what they, what they, they haven't got enough desire to work. There's a few, I'll give you an example. Burger King, these kids work there for not much, but the minute they get a job they get a car. You can't buy a car unless you got a job, unless you got money. So these kids get a job and then they get a car. So I says to one of the kids down there, I go there sometime, I says when you're four or five years old you get a little truck and you go vroom, vroom on the floor, then I says, you get old enough you get a bicycle, then I says when you get old enough you get a car. And I says the first thing you do, you total it. He says, that's what I done. But once, see, now that kid, those are not the general. Those kids that want things so bad that they'll work in McDonald's and Burger King, but they're few and far between and they don't last anyway.

MN: Is it that their parents didn't teach them that it's important to work? I mean their parents always worked didn't they?

JL: Yeah.

MN: And a lot of them worked in the furniture factories.

JL: You know, the kids are brought up different. Their brought up different. The parents don't want to fight em, so they give them what the

kids want. In my day you were brought up with nothing and told to get used to it (laughs). Get used to having nothing, you know. And, so
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JL: They were very good people, very good terms. But your kid today the more he can get out of his parents the more he tries, you know.

MN: So you would think that you had much more respect for your parents than kids have for their's?

JL: Yeah, I think that would be part of the answer.

MN: Could I have one more?

JL: Go on help yourself.

MN: I usually do.

JL: I coined another saying. I don't know if I originated it or not, but today parents are made to be used and abused. That's the way the kids are doing to their parents today. I don't know why.

MN: But why would kids would rather go into high tech than into furniture?

JL: Well, you see furniture is the lowest pays there is.

MN: The lowest paid?

JL: Lowest. Furniture...

MN: What about the, if you had kids, do you have kids?

JL: I never was married.

MN: Would you want them to work in the furniture factories?

JL: No.

MN: Why not?

JL: That's the lowest paid there is. Wood furn, wood workers are the lowest. I can't think of any kind of work that's lower. Automobile

mechanics, thirty, thirty-five dollars an hour. Uh construction workers, ten, fifteen, twenty dollars an hour for just running a machine, not knowing the first thing about anything else. Furniture worker, even metal worker get eight, ten, twelve dollars an hour to go and, you know the highest money you can get in the wood factory, and that's high, is about seven dollars an hour, five, six, seven...

MN: And what about the quality of the work?

JL: Oh that I have no idea. It's got to be good because it wouldn't sell.

MN: But it's uh, I want to ask you this. In the kinds of jobs that you did its uh sort of repetitive, I mean you do the same task over and over.

JL: Over and over and over.

MN: Did that matter to you?

JL: Well, it did and it didn't, cause uh if you weren't too smart you did it many times, you finally learned all the doors (laughs) and, uh, you got accustomed to being repetitive as you might say. You got accustomed to doing it. The faster you did it the more money you made. So, it wasn't boring, but you had to have the mentality for that not to be bored, if you were ambitious, hey, that would drive you crazy. I worked with a guy for five, six years and he did good work and he worked hard but he never was happy, and he went out. Now he's a big man in Gardner here doing, making buildings and all kind, and he still got the like old clothes I, I got on, I wear these around the house because my cat sits on my lap and she tears all my pants up. I seen him come down with four, five bankers and he's got dirty old construction clothes on and they're all around him because he was ambitious. He never was happy about working for four or five dollars an hour, so he got out. There's the difference between an ambitious man and one who just wants to stay the way things are, you know.

MN: So you would say that most of the guys that worked in the furniture plant with you at Heywood's were not ambitious?

JL: If they were ambitious why did they work there. Why didn't they go out. Strike out and do things and try things. They were just satisfied to do what they were doing, living the way they were living and that's it. But, like this guy stands out. He was one of my same kind of people. He was an Acadian. He was a Cormier, which there are many of them in Gardner, and he stood out in my mind and all of us are pretty proud of him, you know. There's Albert who worked with us for five years, six years, whatever, never was happy about working, but he did good work. He was a good worker and he was smart and he went out on his own and he made himself a big man out here, right here in Gardner, big man in Gardner, construction. He built buildings, he did this, he did that. I will admit his love life wasn't that good (chuckles).

MN: You can't have everything.

JL: His first wife was dirty on him. He survived that. He had a lot of determination, a lot of guts. See, he's the individual that wasn't satisfied and he went out in the world, and he made his way and he made money, and he's well off. Somedays I'd meet him on the street, you know, I'd talk to him in our Acadian French, you know, and I'd get a kick out of the way, he's not good with the speech, you know, he's, he's, that isn't his line, his line is hammer and nails and saws and building buildings and all that stuff. So I'm, I'm pretty proud of him, you know, that one of my nationality, one of my race did like he did. He went right out there and did something for himself. He might have been a little tricky in his work but shortcuts.

MN: Did you make, did you make friends with the guys from work?

JL: Eh, no. Yes and no. Eh, we were very friendly in the shop, but when we left the shop we all went our separate ways because we all had separate ideas, you know, had friends on the outside.

MN: How'd you make your friends?

JL: Huh?

MN: From the, did you belong to the Acadian club?

JL: No. I never belonged, I never cared to belong to an organization because I had this trait from my people that came from France. I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it. I don't want to hurt anybody, I just want to do it when I want to do it, the way I want to do it or whatever, you know. So, if you met somebody that was in accord with you, the vibrations as they say, well you became friends, you did the same things together, you know. So, oh Christ, I don't ever remember being really sociable with somebody I worked with. Although we were friendly enough in the shop, we'd joke and laugh and all that stuff, but when you left the shop some went home to their wives, some went to their girlfriends, some went to their clubs and I went my way. There was no hard feelings there at all, no way.

MN: Would you eat lunch with them? At work would you eat lunch together?

JL: We all went out to eat. Like they went home probably to their wives and I went to the restaurant. I'm the guy would never made the same mistake once.

MN: (Chuckles). That's a great trend.

JL: And I have another one. I said, "I met the perfect woman one time, the ideal woman, but she was looking for the ideal man." (Both laugh). Evidently it wasn't me (laughs). That's to make up for the other one. I belittle myself on this one. She was looking for the ideal man, so what could I do.

MN: I have that I.

JL: (Laughs)...

END TAPE TWO, SIDE B